

POINT OF VIEW

Anti-Semitism in Araby

Josef Joffe

THIS WEEK, SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON WILL VISIT ISRAEL AND THE WEST Bank, stepping into the longest-running show in American diplomacy, one that goes all the way back to the Rogers Plan of 1969. The play is called “Mediating in the Middle East,” and it might be another 40 years before the cast sings the finale.

The reasons for this slow pace are familiar: the status of Jerusalem, problems with security, Jewish settlements, civil war among the Palestinians, etc. But one other key problem is stubbornly ignored:

the fact that no Arab regime has shown itself willing to truly prepare its people for peace with Israel, which would mean accepting the lasting presence of Jews in their midst. Indeed, anti-Semitism—the real stuff, not just bad-mouthing particular Israeli policies—is as much part of Arab life today as the hijab or the hookah. Whereas this darkest of creeds is no longer tolerated in polite society in the West, in the Arab world, Jew hatred remains culturally endemic.

For a European, it all feels uncomfortably familiar. Take the cartoons one sees in the government-controlled Arab press. They feature The Jew as a murderous conspirator, a capitalist bloodsucker or Satan himself—the classics. He even looks like his predecessors in *Der Stürmer*, with his hooked nose, thick lip and sinister beard.

Open Egypt's Al-Gomhuria newspaper, and there is The Jew as a serpent strangling Uncle Sam over a caption that reads “The Jews taking over the world.” On Al-Nas TV, Egyptian cleric Ahmad Abd al-Salam tells his viewers, “I want you to imagine the Jews sitting around a table, conspiring how to corrupt the Muslims ... The Jews conspire to infect the food of Muslims with cancer [and] to ship it to Muslim countries.” Al-Salam's colleague, Zaghoul al-Naggar, has called Jews “devils in human form.” And this is a country at peace with Israel.

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazis' chief propagandist, would be proud.

Meanwhile, Saleh Riqab, Hamas's deputy minister of religious endowment, has picked up smoothly where European anti-Semitism leaves off, declaring on TV that “the protocols of the elders of Zion discuss how the Jews should seize control of the world. In Europe, and especially in the U.S., there was a quick Jewish takeover of the major mass media.” One Egyptian cleric has even voiced the widely shared opinion that “Judgment Day will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews.” So much for a two-state solution.

No anti-Semitism is ever complete without the idea of sexual subversion. The Nazis accused the Jews of “polluting” the Aryan race. Sure enough, one Egyptian “expert” has opined on Al-Nas TV that “the No. 1 goal [of the West and the Jews] in spreading pornographic films is to destroy the identity of the Islamic nation.” A favorite trope is the Nazi-Jew comparison, which has a

simple psychological function. Since Nazis are the epitome of evil, so must be the Jews. Thus a Qatari paper has shown the contrails of an Israeli warplane forming a swastika, and a Saudi paper has superimposed it on the Star of David. The official Syrian Tishreen newspaper has depicted an Israeli soldier gesticulating to Adolf Hitler in front of a sea of skulls. The caption reads "The Israeli is explaining to the Nazi: 'We are the same.'" Finally, an example that might be amusing if it didn't illustrate the depth of the problem. It comes from Captain Shahada, of Egypt's Unique Moustache Association, who confessed on Egyptian TV: "I respect the moustache of this Hitler because he humiliated the most despicable sect in the world. He subdued the people who subdued the whole world—him with his [style number] '11' moustache." This is the essence of obsession: the compulsive recurrence of images and ideas over which you have no control.

So peacemakers, beware. They'll have to deal with a civil society on one side that is by no means civil. Indeed, as the Egyptian examples show (and there are plenty more from Jordan), there is an inverse relationship between policy and attitudes. Egypt's government has been at peace with Israel for 30 years; for Jordan, it's been 15.

Cynics might argue that this horrid creed is the price of peace—that the regimes in Cairo and Amman (and Ramallah, Qatar or Riyadh) deliberately stoke the flames of hatred to distract the masses from their quasi alliances with the Jewish state. The Palestinian Authority today owes its life to the Israeli Army. So it has to out-Hamas Hamas when it comes to the Jew-devil.

It's a nice theory, and it might even be true in parts. But it's not sustainable. How can you make or maintain peace with Satan incarnate? The Israelis long ago began to change their textbooks from a nationalist narrative to a more inclusive one that emphasizes not only the Holocaust but also the *nakba*,

the flight and plight of the Arabs in 1948-49. But in Araby, we have the Syrian actress Amal Arafa, who makes a very different point. Even in peace, "Israel will continue to be a black ... spot in my memory, in my genes and in my blood ... We've sucked it in with the milk of our mothers [and] we will pass it down for many more generations."

Good luck, Secretary Clinton.

JOFFE is a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and Abramowitz fellow at the Hoover Institution, both at Stanford.

FRIENDS LIKE THESE: *Egyptians burn an Israeli flag*

SALAH IBRAHIM—EPA